



Time Management

About this Topic: Time Management



Topic Mentor

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Topic Source Notes

Learn

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What Would You Do?

What would you do?

At 5:00 P.M. Marisol looked up from her desk to see her colleagues packing up to go home. At the rate she was going she would be in the office till midnight. As she stared down at her "to-do" list, she sighed in dismay. Three critical tasks remained. What had she been doing all day and why hadn't she gotten to these tasks? She reviewed her day. The morning was spent with Tony talking about his monthly reports. Lunchtime was used to reply to over 20 e-mail messages. And then the afternoon was consumed by a customer service request that should have been handled by somebody else. What was the point of all her "to-do" lists and careful planning if she wasn't getting to the work that she really needed to do? How can Marisol blossom into a brilliant time manager?

What would you do?

Marisol should begin by reviewing her long-term organizational goals. By evaluating and prioritizing her top objectives, Marisol will be able to see where she should and *should not* be spending her time. The next step is to break her goals down into manageable tasks and list all the steps necessary to achieve each task. Next, she should estimate how much time each task or activity will take and set deadlines for completion. She should block out big chunks of time in her calendar to ensure that she makes time to accomplish these tasks. Most importantly, she should do everything she can to avoid interruptions that waste her time or take her away from her primary goals.

In this topic, you'll learn how to identify the jobs that are most—and least—important, focus your time on the most critical task, and avoid time wasters.

How do you manage your time to complete your daily objectives and long-term tasks?

Topic Objectives

This topic helps you:

- Analyze how you currently spend your time and pinpoint opportunities for improvement
- Identify which tasks are most critical to achieving your long-term goals
- Plan your time efficiently using scheduling tools
- Control time-wasters
- Put your schedule into action, evaluate it along the way, and modify it as needed

The benefits of using your time more effectively



E-mail. Voice mail. Meetings. Paperwork. Direct reports who continually ask for help or bring you their problems. How can you be an accessible, responsible manager—yet actually get work done and accomplish your highest-priority goals at the same time?

You need to manage your time skillfully. *Time management* is the discipline of organizing, allocating, and controlling time you use for activities in such a way that you achieve your desired results. Time management forces you to be explicit about what you value and helps you assign your efforts accordingly.

Using your time more effectively generates important benefits for you *and* your organization. For example:

- You devote energy and attention to the activities that most support your company's objectives.
- You eliminate distractions and remain focused on what's most important to your department and organization.
- You avoid the stress and even burnout that can come from trying to juggle the many conflicting demands on your time.
- You model good time-management behaviors, so your employees and peers can learn from your example.
- You improve your on-the-job performance which adds more value to your organization, unit, and teams.

Clearly, a company in which leaders use their time effectively can gain an edge over the competition. But managing your time is more challenging than it may seem on the surface.

Key Idea: Discipline and practice

Key Idea

Using your time effectively takes discipline and practice. A four-step process can help you make the most of the hours you have available:

1. **Start by thinking about your most important on-the-job objectives.** What tasks do you need to complete in order to achieve those objectives? How much time should you be spending on those tasks? Ask yourself these questions first to identify and prioritize your goals.
2. **Then, analyze how you spend your time.** Often, managers think they're using their time to accomplish vital tasks. But in reality, they're spending time on activities that don't enable them to achieve their high-priority objectives. For example, they squander hours each day rather than planning long-term strategy for their department. To use your time more effectively, you need to figure out how you're actually spending your time—and compare it to how you should be allocating it. This process will help you to identify ineffective time-management practices.
3. **Now you can schedule your time more effectively.** Once you know what your goals are, how you're actually spending your time, and which ineffective time-management practices you're falling prey to, you can change the way you schedule your time. That includes using time-management tools more effectively and building schedules that support your priorities. It also means allocating time for resolving unexpected problems and taking advantage of unplanned opportunities.
4. **Continually monitor and improve your time-management strategies.** Once you've created a schedule, put it into action. Monitor what happens, identify problems, and fine-tune your time-management strategies so that you constantly improve the way you're using your time.

Managing your time requires a disciplined approach and practice.

What are goals?



Goals are the starting point of effective time management. They act as a compass, pointing the way to the things that you should be concentrating on. Identify your goals and you will know what is most important to accomplish on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

Goal setting is a formal process of defining outcomes worth achieving. When you set goals, you commit to outcomes that you can accomplish personally or through your team. By setting goals and measuring their achievement, you can:

- Focus on what is most important
- Provide a unified direction for your team
- Devote less energy to non-critical tasks
- Avoid time-wasters
- Motivate yourself
- Boost overall job satisfaction

Goals vary in terms of time frames and importance. Thus, it's vital to understand how to categorize and prioritize them.

Types of goals

Goals can be categorized—in order of importance—as critical, enabling, or nice-to-have. The table below outlines the differences.

TYPES OF GOALS

Goal Type	Definition	Example
Critical	Objectives that must be accomplished in order for your department or unit to continue running successfully	For a project manager, completing a two-year project on time and within budget would be a critical goal.
Enabling	Objectives that create a more desirable business condition in the long run or take advantage of a business opportunity	For a product-development manager, providing training that enables his or her team to work more effectively would be an enabling goal.

Nice-to-have	Objectives that enhance your business—by making activities faster, easier, or more appealing—but don't revolutionize your business	For a unit manager, developing a new expense-reporting form that's easier to complete and takes less time to fill out than the current form would be a nice-to-have goal.
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Your critical and enabling goals are *most* crucial and should guide the way you manage your time.

Align your goals

Managers should create a set of cascading goals, beginning with company goals. Unit goals should, in turn, support company goals. Individual goals should then support the unit goals. These three levels of goals—company, unit, and individual—should be aligned and communicated so that an individual employee can say (without prompting):

"Our company's goal is to _____. My department's contribution to that goal is to _____. And my part in this effort is to _____."

Consider your company. How explicitly has management defined and communicated its highest goals to managers and employees? If you are a manager, how effectively have you spelled out corporate-level goals to your unit and its individual members? Does each person understand the company's goals and his or her part in working towards them? By formulating and communicating clear goals, you help yourself and your employees make the most of their time at work.

Prioritize your goals

Prioritizing your goals means ranking them in importance. You can do this in two ways:

- **Identify critical and enabling goals.** List all your on-the-job goals for the year. Which are critical? Which are enabling? Which are merely nice-to-have? Write down the reasons you've defined each goal as you did. Then rank the goals in order of priority.
- **Distinguish between urgent and crucial tasks.** Urgent tasks demand immediate attention. But every urgent matter does not necessarily support a critical goal.

For example, suppose you're overseeing a big project that must be completed on time and within budget this year. Your boss wants you to participate in an all-day seminar on employee development tomorrow, but you had planned to meet with your project team to discuss the project plan. The seminar demands your immediate attention—but it doesn't directly support your critical goals. Thus, while it's urgent (you have to make time for it immediately), it is not necessarily crucial.

Urgent tasks tend to consume your immediate attention, crowding out time and resources better allocated to critical goals. This problem typically occurs when critical goals are long-term because there's no need (or possibility) to achieve them immediately.

What urgent tasks are you facing this week? Make a list. Which tasks support your critical and/or enabling goals? Those that do are the tasks that you should focus on first and foremost.

Discipline yourself to differentiate between urgent tasks that support critical and enabling goals and those that don't. Once you recognize the difference, you'll know best how to prioritize your work and allocate your time.

Leadership Insight: Dinner at six

Without a doubt, one of the greatest challenges my colleagues and clients come to me with is time management. Everybody today is so busy and trying to cram so much into their day, and they are having a hard time getting it all done. So I take them back to my strategic planning framework because, after all, failing to plan is planning to fail.

What I have my people do —and I do it myself — is every day in the morning take some time out to say, "What is my mission for today, what do I want to accomplish?" And I set aside a time every morning when I'm doing my swim to think, "What are the three or four big things that I want to get done today and that are nonnegotiable?" And everything else that comes my way needs to be put aside until those things are accomplished.

I had one physician take a course — my Business of Life course — and this became a big issue for her. So I worked with her in the course and a bit afterward to figure out what she could do. And I said, "What are your goals?" She said, "I need to see my patients but the demands of clinical documentation and all of the paperwork are getting so great that it is really sucking the joy out of my day. And I'm not getting home to see my family. It is just not OK."

So we set goals for her that she was going to get home by six o'clock to be with her family every day, no matter what. So we looked at what she herself had to accomplish. She had to see her own patients. She had to write up what happened in those visits. So we set that aside as that's something she is going to do. And we looked at how she could do that more efficiently, and we signed her up for classes to learn how to use electronic medical records more efficiently. That bought her some time.

Then we looked at some other things that she was doing that other people could do and what she could delegate. So filling out camp forms and school forms and writing letters of recommendation were things that she could delegate to some other people. Some things she discovered didn't need to be done at all. So they just came off her list.

And as we did some diagnosis and treatment for her, we looked at her calendar and how she was actually spending her day. And we discovered that she was an e-mail addict, as many people we know are. So to deal with that problem, we had her turn off the sound on her computer so she didn't get an alert every time they came in and felt compelled to go and answer them.

We had her schedule e-mail time, so she had a little time in the morning and half an hour in the afternoon. She had to hold herself to that and go cold turkey the rest of the day. That allowed her to stay on point and on task to get much more efficient. And in those rare moments where she couldn't get her work done by six o'clock, she still went home, had dinner with her family,

and — after her child went to bed — completed that work, but really tried to hold that to a minimum.

A couple of years later I was delighted to see her at a party and she was so thrilled that the things that she had learned were so successful that she and her husband had agreed they would have a second child. And they have been making sure that they continue their tradition of having dinner at six o'clock every night.

Setting daily goals can help you to manage a demanding schedule.

Allison Rimm

President and CEO, Allison Rimm and Associates

Allison Rimm is the Senior Vice President of Strategic Planning and Information Management at Massachusetts General Hospital. In addition to her work at the hospital, Allison is the President and CEO of Allison Rimm and Associates, LLC, which provides coaching and management consulting services to visionary organizations seeking to harness the power of their employees.

Her consulting practice focuses on matching the needs of organizations with the skills, talents, and passions of their workforce to drive extraordinary business performance and to create teams that are joyfully committed to their collective mission.

She has merged her passion for teaching and coaching with her strong executive skills to create the popular Business of Life workshops. These experiential workshops teach participants how to apply the principles of strategic planning to achieve their personal and professional goals. Her Web site is: www.allisonrimm.com.

Step 1: Identify required tasks



You've prioritized your goals. Now you need to break them into manageable tasks and figure out how much time each task will require.

Take each of the goals you and your unit must achieve. List all the key tasks required to achieve each goal.

Step 2: Prioritize tasks

Once you're satisfied that your list of tasks is complete, assign "A," "B," or "C" priorities to each one—with A representing the highest-priority tasks. The priorities you assign to the tasks should reflect the importance of the goal that each task supports:

- **A priorities** support your critical goals. They are tasks with high value and are of primary concern.
- **B priorities** support your enabling goals and indirectly support your critical goals. They are tasks with medium value and a high degree of urgency.
- **C priorities** include both urgent and non-urgent tasks with little value and little importance.

Step 3: Sequence tasks

“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work”
—Peter Drucker

As you examine your tasks, you'll notice that some are sequential, while others are nonsequential.

- **Sequential tasks** need to be completed in a sequence—that is, each one needs to be more or less finished before the next task can begin.

For example, a major report developed for senior management might have this sequence:

Gather data --> Outline report --> Write report --> Circulate for comment --> Submit

Put sequential tasks in correct order, indicating which tasks you must complete personally and which must be completed by your unit or team. The figure below depicts this process.

- **Nonsequential tasks** are those that *don't* follow such a linear sequence. For instance, if you're coordinating development of a new computer system, the software developers may need to wait until some, but not all, of the hardware is developed. After that point, much of the two groups' work can be done in parallel. For these kinds of tasks, note the relationships between groups and keep them in mind later when you're scheduling your work.

Step 4: Estimate required time

Gauge how much time each A- and B-priority task or activity you've identified will require to complete. If you've completed a similar task before, use that experience as a basis for your time estimate. If you haven't, consult with colleagues, your manager, or peers who can help provide estimates. Add a 10–20% "cushion" to allow for unanticipated problems.

The table shows an example of how one goal has been broken into its component tasks, with estimated times assigned to each.

Tasks and Time

Goal:	
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Launch a series of internal training seminars. Initially, two per month for a period of three months (total = 6). If well-attended and judged effective, the series will be continued.			
Task #	Activity	Time estimate (minutes)	Comment
1	Initial brainstorming meeting	60	Include Ramon, Harriet, Julie, and Peter
2	Second meeting: determine subjects and speakers	75	Include the people above plus Fred
3	Brainstorm seminar site and internal promotion/communications	120	
4	Meet with each speaker individually	240	
5	Develop communication package	180	Involve marketing
6	Supervise implementation	180	
7	Post-seminar evaluation	60	What worked and what didn't
8		60	

	Send each speaker a note of thanks and a small gift		
	Total time	975	Hours: 16.25

You'll also want to establish a deadline for completing each task or activity. For complex activities, set up interim milestones to track your progress. For unusually large goals that involve a team of other people, consider adopting the *work breakdown structure* (WBS) approach used by project managers. WBS is a planning routine that deconstructs a project's goal into the many tasks required to achieve it. You can also use this routine to estimate money needed to complete the tasks.

You've broken your high-priority goals into tasks and estimated how much time each will require. So now you know how much time you *should* be spending on various important tasks. But how are you *really* spending your time?

By analyzing your actual use of time and comparing it with how you should be spending it, you can identify—and address—poor time-management practices.

Activity: Breaking a goal into tasks

Try your hand at organizing a project that is broken down into smaller, manageable tasks.

Derek needs to assess the costs and benefits of the tradeshow his company attends. He's decided this is a high priority task.

What step should happen first?

- ☐ Derek establishes a sequence for completing tasks that must be completed in a certain order.

Not the best choice. Before this, Derek must define the project's components to provide a clear direction for the project. Without a well-defined vision for the project's scope and path, Derek could invest significant time and effort with little result.

- ☐ Derek determines that his analysis will require verifying all tradeshow costs with the accounting office, identifying lead generation results and the average value of those leads, analyzing his findings, writing a report, and making a recommendation.

Correct choice. Before starting, Derek defines the project's components to provide a clear direction for the project. Without a well-defined vision for the project's scope and path, Derek could invest significant time and effort with little result.

- ☐ Derek estimates how much time each component will take, based on his previous experiences with cost-benefit analyses.

Not the best choice. Before this, Derek must define the project's components to provide a clear direction for the project. Without a well-defined vision for the project's scope and path, Derek could invest significant time and effort with little result.

☐ Derek determines that defining lead generation results is an A priority and getting a detailed cost breakdown is a B priority.

Not the best choice. Before this, Derek must define the project's components to provide a clear direction for the project. Without a well-defined vision for the project's scope and path, Derek could invest significant time and effort with little result.

What step should happen next?

☐ Derek establishes a sequence for completing tasks that must be completed in a certain order.

Not the best choice. Before this, it's important to decide which tasks are high priority and which ones are lower priority before allocating time and sequencing project steps. Derek knows other pressing issues will arise during this project, and he won't be able to give every component his complete attention. Prioritizing his tasks keeps the project on-track and keeps him from getting stuck in the details.

☐ Derek determines that his analysis will require verifying all tradeshow costs with the accounting office, identifying lead generation results and the average value of those leads, analyzing his findings, writing a report, and making a recommendation.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

☐ Derek estimates how much time each component will take, based on his previous experiences with cost-benefit analyses.

Not the best choice. Before this, it's important to decide which tasks are high priority and which ones are lower priority before allocating time and sequencing project steps. Derek knows other pressing issues will arise during this project, and he won't be able to give every component his complete attention. Prioritizing his tasks keeps the project on-track and keeps him from getting stuck in the details.

☐ Derek determines that defining lead generation results is an A priority and getting a detailed cost breakdown is a B priority.

Correct choice. It's important to decide which tasks are high priority and which ones are lower priority before allocating time and sequencing project steps. Derek knows other pressing issues will arise during this project, and he won't be able to give every component his complete attention. Prioritizing his tasks keeps the project on-track and keeps him from getting stuck in the details.

What step should happen third?

☐ Derek establishes a sequence for completing tasks that must be completed in a certain order.

Correct choice. Determining which tasks must be completed in sequence (versus in parallel) is best done before making time estimates, since tradeoffs may need to be made between time, resources, and the project deadline.

☐ Derek determines that his analysis will require verifying all tradeshow costs with the accounting office, identifying lead generation results and the average value of those leads, analyzing his findings, writing a report, and making a recommendation.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

☐ Derek estimates how much time each component will take, based on his previous experiences with cost-benefit analyses.

Not the best choice. Determining which tasks must be completed in sequence (versus in parallel) is best done before making time estimates, since tradeoffs may need to be made between time, resources, and the project deadline.

☐ Derek determines that defining lead generation results is an A priority and getting a detailed cost breakdown is a B priority.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

What step should happen last?

☐ Derek establishes a sequence for completing tasks that must be completed in a certain order.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

☐ Derek determines that his analysis will require verifying all tradeshow costs with the accounting office, identifying lead generation results and the average value of those leads, analyzing his findings, writing a report, and making a recommendation.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

☐ Derek estimates how much time each component will take, based on his previous experiences with cost-benefit analyses.

Correct choice. Estimating time to complete each task is best done after sequencing the tasks, since tradeoffs may need to be made between time, resources, and the project deadline.

☐ Derek determines that defining lead generation results is an A priority and getting a detailed cost breakdown is a B priority.

Not the best choice. This step should have already occurred at this point.

Create an activity log

Taking control of your time so that it supports your key goals is much easier if you understand how you're *currently* spending time. You can't plan and control your future use of time until you gain this understanding.

Create a written record of your time use—an *activity log*—for an entire week. Be sure to cover three or more typical days in your log. (For example, don't include days with an atypical amount of travel.)

Below is an excerpt from an activity log showing how Jane, a manager, spent one day.

Sample Daily Activity Log

	Activity	Minutes used	Priority
8:45	E-mail: check and respond	15	B
9:00	Break: Coffee room; chatting	9	C
9:09	Wait for meeting; tidy desk	6	C
9:15	Meeting: Product launch team	60	A
10:15	Break: Coffee; personal e-mail	15	C
10:30	Phone: External S. Heming, Confirm lunch	12	B
10:42	Phone: Internal D. Gertz	8	B
10:50	E-mail: Respond to Bill	3	C
10:53	Internet: Check weather, news	7	C

11:00	Prepare: for lunch meeting	8	B
11:08	Meeting: Bonus plan discussion	32	C
11:40	Travel: Off-site lunch meeting with A. Davis	120	B
1:52	E-mail: Send and respond	12	C
2:04	Phone: Return voice messages	11	C
2:15	Visitor: Summer intern asking directions	8	C
2:23	Visitor: D. Horowitz asked about project	5	A
2:28	Paperwork: Begin monthly project report	4	B
2:32	E-mail: Incoming	3	C
2:35	Paperwork: Resume project report	12	B
2:47	Break: Coffee	10	C
2:57	Prepare: Gather material for meeting	3	B

3:00	Meeting: Budget review	75	B
4:15	E-mail: Send and respond	11	B
4:26	Internet: Check news	4	C
4:30	Plan: Check/adjust calendar for project work	10	A
4:40	Paperwork: Resume project report	10	B
4:50	E-mail: Outgoing, project related	10	B
5:00	Go home		

A good activity log has several characteristics:

- It shows *every* activity you engage in *as you do it*.
- It records *how much time* you spent on each activity.
- It includes even *minor things* (such as tidying your desk, taking coffee breaks, and so forth).
- It labels each entry with a *specific category*—such as "e-mail," "paperwork," "Internet," "phone," "planning," "meetings," "visitors," and "travel."

Assign a priority to each activity in your log

Once you've logged your activities for a day, assign a priority to each based on your critical, enabling, and nice-to-have goals. Remember:

- **A priorities** involve your *critical* goals. They represent tasks with high value and primary concern.
- **B priorities** entail your *enabling* goals and indirectly support your critical goals. They're tasks with medium value and a high degree of urgency.
- **C priorities** may involve your *nice-to-have* goals and include both urgent and non-urgent tasks with little value.

Analyze patterns of time use

Examine your log to find patterns of time use. Ask these questions:

- **"What kinds of activities are consuming most of my time?"** Paperwork, coffee breaks, returning voice mail messages?
- **"Where are certain kinds of activities clustering?"** Do you spend the majority of Monday mornings on responding to e-mail? Do you tend to have lots of unexpected visitors after lunch? Do meetings cluster later in the week?

Now consider whether you're using your time in ways that support your goals. Ask:

- **"Does this use of time match my most important objectives?"** Spending the majority of your day on the phone may be appropriate if you're in sales, but not if you work in accounts payable.
- **"How much of my day is spent on A- and B-priority activities?"** Your ultimate goal is to spend most of your day on high-priority activities, with C-priority activities taking up a very small portion of your day.

Using a highlighter, mark C-priority activities in your log to make these time-wasters more obvious. If you see lots of colored ink, you'll know there's plenty of room for improvement!

Identify ways to improve your use of time

“ The whole point of getting things done is knowing what to leave undone ”
 –Lady Sheila Reading

Are you spending more time than you should on C-priority activities—and not enough time on A- and B-priority activities? If so, look for ways to eliminate or delegate C-priority activities that are wasting your time.

For example, if you work in Sales and you're spending too much time on paperwork, consider delegating the work to an assistant.

Also seek the causes underlying your mismanagement of time. Ask yourself tough personal questions—and answer them honestly:

Q: "Why am I spending so much time in low-value meetings?"

A: "Because I'm afraid that people won't think of me as a team player if I don't attend."

Q: "Why am I squandering time on unscheduled visitors?"

A: "Because I'd feel rude if I told people I didn't have time to talk with them."

Q: "Why do I devote so many hours to e-mail and the Internet?"

A: "Because much of my e-mailing is personal, and I surf the Web to procrastinate."

Once you understand these underlying causes of your time mismanagement, you can take steps to remove them. For instance:

- Remind yourself that you *will* be seen as a team player if you attend meetings that *are* important to your high-priority goals.
- Explain to unscheduled visitors that you've got a big deadline you have to meet, and then suggest a time you can get together for lunch to chat. Or, if you tend to get lots of surprise

visits in the hours after lunchtime, close your office door during that part of the day.

- Try to cut down on personal e-mailing—for example, by asking friends and family to e-mail you at home instead of at work. If you use the Web to procrastinate, commit to tackling tough projects as soon as you notice you're putting them off.

As with any behavioral changes, correcting time mismanagement takes *time*. Change your behaviors gradually, practicing one or two new behaviors each week until they become routine. And if you make a mistake, don't be too hard on yourself. Just start practicing the new behaviors again.

Certain "time-wasters" are notoriously widespread and will show up in many managers' activity logs. In the next Core Concept, you'll learn how to recognize—and combat—them.

Activity: Analyzing an activity log

Analyze an activity log and identify ways to improve time usage.

Grace is responsible for a critical project that involves significant research. To learn where she can cut back on time-wasting activities and better manage her time, she's keeping an activity log. Consider Grace's log entries and think about how she could reallocate her time:

8:45: Email: Check and respond. 15 min. B priority

9:00: Break: Coffee room; chatting. 9 min. C priority

9:09: Project Research: Read project data. 21 min. B priority

9:30: Meeting: Project team check-in. 45 min. A priority

10:15: Break: Browsed Internet. 11 min. C priority

10:26: Phone: External, Bill. Confirm lunch. 9 minutes. B priority

10:35: Break: Browsed Internet. 15 minutes. C priority

10:50: Project Research: Resume project data. 45 min. B priority

11:35: Interruption: Handle a customer service issue. 25 min. A priority

12:00: Off-site: lunch with Bill. A priority

Grace wanted to spend at least half of her morning conducting research for her project. Did she meet her goal?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Grace only spent a third, or 33% of her time this morning working on the research project. She spent about 35% of her time on personal and business interruptions. If Grace used the time spent browsing the Internet to conduct project research, she would have spent almost half of the morning, or 47% of her time, on project research.

☐ No

Correct choice. Grace only spent a third, or 33% of her time this morning working on the research project. She spent about 35% of her time on personal and business interruptions. If Grace used the time spent browsing the Internet to conduct project research, she would have spent almost half of the morning, or 47% of her time, on project research.

Which of the following is *not* contributing to Grace's lack of progress on her project?

- ☐ Grace failed to properly prioritize her time.

Not the best choice. This *is* contributing to Grace's lack of progress. Grace should prioritize tasks and then make a commitment to spend her time on her highest priority tasks. She should also allot some unscheduled time for unexpected priority activities such as handling a customer issue.

- ☐ Grace allowed for too many interruptions to her work.

Not the best choice. This *is* contributing to Grace's lack of progress. Grace had many interruptions during the morning—both personal and business related. Some interruptions are unavoidable, but minimizing procrastination and accurately gauging a task's importance can limit the interruptions and help Grace focus on important projects.

- ☐ Grace spent too much time answering emails.

Correct choice. Grace effectively set aside a block of time for answering emails and did not let this task bleed over into the rest of the morning.

Which of the following is *not* an effective way for Grace to rearrange her schedule to make her morning more productive?

- ☐ Redistribute her personal breaks

Not the best choice. This *would* make Grace's mornings more productive. Grace takes several personal breaks very close together during her morning. She could be more productive and allocate more time to her project if she distributed those breaks throughout the day.

- ☐ Start her day earlier

Correct choice. Although starting her day earlier would give her more time, Grace could be more productive by evaluating how she allocates her time and rearranging her schedule.

- ☐ Allocate a certain time for business and personal interruptions

Not the best choice. This *would* make Grace's mornings more productive. Grace allows herself to get distracted by less important tasks, and this forces her to have to refocus and backtrack when she resumes work on her priority tasks.

Leadership Insight: Productivity

My first supervisory job was an opportunity really to ease my way into leadership through leading a smaller group of professionals and having more opportunity for one-on-one guidance and leadership. This was a group of talented people, and one particular professional was lagging behind in his performance, in his deliverability and his rate of production of the work.

I was very curious because he was there. He was present. He was working. We discussed it, and he acknowledged that he might not be as focused during the working day on the job and he might wander around with his mind or something or spend time on this or that.

But his explanation was: "I make it up by working through lunch. I don't take a lunch break."

I was curious about that, and we agreed to log his activities on a daily basis. And we did. He actually was very honest, and he logged it on half-hour blocks what he was doing. He would just check, check, check.

The key thing, of course, is the trust, respect and honesty in this kind of interaction and relationship. So when we looked at the data it was interesting. There was time on the Internet that might start with a work-related thing and then wander on. Too much time on e-mail. Long coffee breaks.

Funny thing, it added up to when we scaled it up to a working month, it equaled about 40 hours. Forty hours is a work week. My message to him was: There aren't 40 lunch hours in a month — there are only 22. The debt is a lot bigger than you can pay with lunch hours. He was very easily convinced.

The transition didn't happen overnight, but when he came back from vacation I was very amazed at his performance and efficiency. He was just a completely changed man.

That took trust, respect, and honesty in assessment and good communication between the leadership and the professional.

Measure how time is invested in order to see where time is wasted.

Aus Al-Tawil

Acting Manager, Reservoir Characterization Department, Saudi Aramco

Aus Al-Tawil is the Acting Manager of the Reservoir Characterization Department (RCD) in Saudi Aramco's Exploration Organization.

Saudi Aramco oversees the world's largest conventional reserves of crude oil, is the world's largest producer and exporter of crude oil, and leads the world in exporting natural gas liquids. Aus joined the Exploration Organization in 2000 with a specialty in carbonate geology, working in the Gas Fields Characterization Division of RCD.

Prior to joining Saudi Aramco, Aus was a Visiting Research Scientist with the Mobil Technology Company's Carbonates Research Group. He was also a teaching assistant in the Ph.D. program in the Geological Sciences department at Virginia Tech.

Aus holds a Bachelor of Science in geology from King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia.

Procrastination



Procrastination is the habit of putting off, delaying, or deferring an action to a later time. People procrastinate for various reasons: Perhaps they find the task at hand unpleasant or uninteresting, they fear they won't perform the task well, or they don't know where to begin. Consider these antidotes to procrastination:

Cause of Procrastination	Antidotes
Unpleasant or uninteresting task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delegate the task—it may not be unpleasant to someone else.• Admit you're procrastinating—and get the job done.• Envision how good you'll feel once you've completed the task.• Schedule the task in a way that makes turning back impossible.
Fear of failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you lack the training or resources needed to complete an assignment, say so—and get the help you need.• If your fear stems from lack of self-confidence, defuse it by being proactive and planning all the things you'll

	<p>have to do to complete the job.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get on with the job: Activity can help dispel fear.
Unclear starting point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jump in anywhere. You'll likely find a productive way forward. • Break the job into component parts, then specify tasks needed to complete each part. Sequence them—then tackle the first task.

Schedule overloading

Do you take on more commitments and responsibilities than you can handle? Do you work nights and weekends to hit your deadlines? Do you feel as if no matter what you do, you will never be caught up? If so, apply these practices:

- **Know your key responsibilities and goals.** Avoid taking on activities that don't support these objectives.
- **Delegate.** Instead of taking over tasks because others aren't doing their jobs or not performing to your standards, delegate the tasks to the individuals who are responsible for them.
- **Don't assume everything *has* to be done.** Concentrate your energy on tasks that truly matter.
- **Learn to say no to your peers and boss.** Explain your key responsibilities, point out how taking on an unrelated task will jeopardize your goals, and offer a reasonable alternative.

Direct reports' problems

“It has been my observation that most people get ahead during the time that others waste time.”
—Henry Ford

Are you running out of time while your direct reports are running out of work? Perhaps you're letting employees bring problems to you that they should be solving themselves. If so, learn to help direct reports solve their own problems:

- Let people seek counsel from you on a problem—but only to report progress or issues in handling the problem.
- When employees bring problems to you, ask them how *they* plan to handle the situation.
- Provide feedback on direct reports' proposed solutions to a problem, but make sure employees—not you—implement the solutions.

Unnecessary travel

Travel consumes a lot of time, thus you should routinely assess its value. Here's how:

1. Track the hours spent on activities such as getting to the airport, waiting in the terminal, and returning home.
2. Estimate what those hours cost in terms of your salary and benefits. Add that figure to the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals.
3. Compare the value produced by your trip to its financial cost. Is there a net gain or loss.
4. Consider your trip's opportunity costs—the value you could have created if you had stayed in your office.
5. Consider alternatives to travel—such as conference calls or Web conferencing.

Email and paperwork overload

To avoid losing valuable time to e-mail:

- Check e-mail only at assigned times during the day.
- Ask nonbusiness correspondents to use your home e-mail address.
- "Triage" your messages: Delete all junk e-mail, then move urgent messages to a folder labeled "Urgent." Deal with these at a specified time. Sweep other messages to a "Later" folder, and respond to them *after* handling all the high-priority tasks on your schedule.
- Ask people to create specific subject lines for their messages, so you can discern whether to delete a message, act on it immediately, or deal with it later.
- Let people know the kinds of information you want—and don't want—to receive by e-mail.

To manage paperwork:

- If a paper communication doesn't require a response from you, skim it and then toss or file as appropriate.
- If it does, and you can respond quickly, do so immediately and then toss or file the communication.
- If you're too busy to provide a required response, delegate it if possible, or put it in a "Later" file, ranked by priority.

Mismanaged meetings

To reduce time wasted in meetings:

- Eliminate or opt out of unnecessary meetings.
- Avoid meetings to which you have little to contribute or from which you have little to gain.
- Before committing to a meeting, ask for an agenda so you can determine whether to attend.
- If you're organizing a meeting, ensure that it follows an agenda, stays on schedule, and ends with specific actions people have committed to.

Distractions and switching costs



Distractions, such as checking weather on the Web or chatting with a visitor, force you to take time to review what you were doing *before* the distraction—and to refocus your mind on the task at hand. These *switching costs* can collectively reduce a company's efficiency by 20–40%. To resist distractions when you're working on something important:

- Have voice mail pick up your calls.
- Turn off your e-mail.
- Clear your desk of newspapers and other irrelevant materials.
- Close your office door and put a "Do not disturb" sign on it.
- Concentrate on a single task until it's finished. Then move to the next one.

Activity: What are your time wasters?

Assess your vulnerability to common time wasters.

Which of the following activities are time wasters for you? Manually tally your good practices as you go.

Do you sometimes take a short break from your work, for example, by having an afternoon chat with coworkers or by going for a walk?

☐ Yes

Correct choice. An occasional break can help re-energize you. An afternoon coffee break with coworkers or a short walk is not necessarily a time waster as long as you keep the break short and limit the frequency. However, frequent breaks may be a signal that you are avoiding your task.

☐ No

Not the best choice. This is actually *not* a time-waster. An occasional break can help re-energize you. An afternoon coffee break with coworkers or a short walk is not necessarily a time waster as long as you keep the break short and limit the frequency. However, frequent breaks may be a signal that you are avoiding your task.

Is your work often interrupted by phone calls and visitors?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Distractions slow you down because they force you to spend time refocusing on your task, usually by reviewing work you've already finished. Try eliminating environmental distractions and identify the points where you can address interruptions with minimal impact on your work.

☐ No

Correct choice. Distractions slow you down because they force you to spend time refocusing on your task, usually by reviewing work you've already finished. Try eliminating environmental distractions and identify the points where you can address interruptions with minimal impact on your work.

Think about your recent business trips. Did you feel that they were productive?

☐ Yes

Correct choice. Business travel can consume significant amounts of time. Before taking a trip consider the opportunity costs versus the possible benefits, and decide whether a different alternative such as a virtual meeting might be adequate.

☐ No

Not the best choice. Business travel can consume significant amounts of time. Before taking a trip consider the opportunity costs versus the possible benefits, and decide whether a different alternative such as a virtual meeting might be adequate.

Do you often work nights and weekends to accomplish all your goals?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Finding a work-life balance is essential to your success. Try reevaluating which projects you should accept and assess how you prioritize your tasks. Consider delegating projects if you feel overextended.

☐ No

Correct choice. Finding a work-life balance is essential to your success. Try reevaluating which projects you should accept and assess how you prioritize your tasks. Consider delegating projects if you feel overextended.

Do you find yourself frequently talking about non-work related issues while on the job?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Not a good practice. Distractions can be a good brain break, and it's important to allow yourself some time away to clear your head. However, be careful that your breaks aren't becoming counterproductive and using too much of your and your coworkers time.

☐ No

Correct choice. Distractions can be a good brain break, and it's important to allow yourself some time away to clear your head. However, be careful that your breaks aren't becoming counterproductive and using too much of your and your coworkers time.

Do you often spend hours at a time responding to emails?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Emails are important, but can be very time consuming. Try allocating a few minutes at different points in the day for email correspondence. During these times prioritize your emails, and respond to the most pressing issues, leaving less important ones for later.

☐ No

Correct choice. Emails are important, but can be very time consuming. Try allocating a few minutes at different points in the day for email correspondence. During these times prioritize your emails, and respond to the most pressing issues, leaving less important ones for later.

Do you frequently help direct reports resolve issues related to their work?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Being an involved manager is important, but also encourage your employees to tackle their own challenges. Be available for counsel, but ask them how they plan to solve the issue.

☐ No

Correct choice. Being an involved manager is important, but also encourage your employees to tackle their own challenges. Be available for counsel, but ask them how they plan to solve the issue.

Do you often feel that much of your time is spent on low-priority issues such as paperwork?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Try developing a system for handling non-essential tasks. Assess which paperwork must be handled immediately during one period and file or discard other papers at your discretion.

☐ No

Correct choice. Try developing a system for handling non-essential tasks. Assess which paperwork must be handled immediately during one period and file or discard other papers at your discretion.

Do you review meeting agendas before deciding whether to accept meeting requests?

☐ Yes

Correct choice. Agendas are critical to the success of a meeting. If you're invited to a meeting, ask for the agenda to determine if your presence is necessary.

☐ No

Not the best choice. Agendas are critical to the success of a meeting. If you're invited to a meeting, ask for the agenda to determine if your presence is necessary.

Do you find it hard to schedule time for all your projects during the work week?

☐ Yes

Not the best choice. Try accepting the projects that support your goals and delegating the tasks others could handle. Letting low-priority projects go and learning to say no are important to your success.

☐ No

Correct choice. Try accepting the projects that support your goals and delegating the tasks others could handle. Letting low-priority projects go and learning to say no are important to your success.

According to the previous questions, how many good practices do you exhibit in avoiding time wasters?

☐ 0-6

Consider changing your time management practices. Start by keeping an activity log to identify your potential time wasters. Then adopt new strategies to help you manage your time more productively.

☐ 7-8

Time management is a constantly evolving skill. Consider whether you are setting priorities consistently and then honoring those priorities.

☐ 9-10

You're well on your way to efficient time management. Remember to assess your progress frequently. Make sure your processes are streamlined, and ensure that you're not overlooking lower priority tasks.

Make a schedule



Now that you know how you spend your time and are on the alert for time wasters, you're ready to begin scheduling your time more effectively. Your goal? To use time in ways that help you achieve your most important goals.

A *schedule* is the best way to deal with time systematically. A schedule is a written commitment to accomplish tasks within a specific time frame. It lets you visualize your available time and your plan for allocating it. And it permits you to easily see uncommitted blocks of time. Most important, it shows you whether your A- and B-priority tasks are occupying most of your time—as they should be.

Select scheduling tools

There are many different types of scheduling tools:

- "To-do" lists
- Appointment calendars
- Daily and weekly planners, printed or electronic
- Networked scheduling software and hardware
- Wall calendars

Your company may provide such tools. Use them if they fit your personal style; find others if they don't. You'll be much more likely to use a system that suits your working style.

Key Idea: Develop your schedule

Key Idea

Develop your schedule by entering tasks into it and indicating the time frames in which you expect to complete the tasks. These guidelines can help you build a useful schedule:

- Enter A-priority tasks first, then put B-priority tasks in the remaining time slots.
- Schedule activities that require creativity and energy during the time of day when you tend to be most alert and energetic. Schedule routine tasks during low-energy periods.
- Leave some blocks of time unscheduled to accommodate unexpected crises, opportunities, and serendipitous exchanges with your colleagues, peers, or direct reports.

- Avoid back-to-back meetings. You need time after each meeting to process the information and execute action items.
- Consolidate tasks such as e-mail, paperwork, and phone calls when possible. For example, set aside 9:00-9:30 AM and 4:30-5:00 PM for these tasks. Consolidating tasks usually reduces the total time required to do them by eliminating start-up and switching time.
- As your week progresses, move uncompleted priority tasks to future open times, "bumping" lower-priority tasks if necessary.
- Keep your schedule in plain sight on your computer monitor or at your desk.

Filling out your schedule with anticipated projects and tasks helps you get a handle on how to manage your time.

Make a to-do list

“Yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose”
-Lyndon B. Johnson

A simple and commonly used scheduling tool, a **to-do list**, captures all the tasks you need to complete on a given day in one eye-catching format. It includes:

- Meetings you need to attend
- Decisions you must make
- Phone calls you have to make or expect to receive
- E-mails, letters, and memos you need to write
- Unfinished A- and B-priority tasks from the previous day

Many managers prepare a to-do list first thing in the morning or at the end of the day and use the list in conjunction with a daily or weekly planner.

For example, if your day-planner schedule calls for you to "return phone calls" on Tuesday between 3:00 PM and 4:00 PM, your to-do list for that day could identify each person you need to call and indicate the purpose of each conversation.

Get the most from your to-do list

You'll get the most from your to-do list by applying these strategies:

- Include half the number of things you think you can do; it's all too easy to underestimate how much time tasks will require.
- Keep "urgent but unimportant" and low-priority tasks off the list entirely.
- Review the list at the end of the day. Were any A- and B-priority tasks left undone? If there were, they will have to be rescheduled—but not until you ask yourself *why* you failed to complete them as planned.

If you're not a list person, consider experimenting with ways of representing your "to do's."

For instance, arrange sticky notes on a big piece of paper or a white board to create a "mind map" of your key tasks. Here's an example of one manager's mind map:

Build flexibility into your schedule

As people take on higher levels of managerial responsibility, their duties become less structured and their work becomes more ambiguous and unpredictable. Thus, managers' schedules need to contain enough flexibility to accommodate such work.

To build flexibility into your schedule:

- Block off more "free time" in your daily schedule.
- Enter only the most critical tasks and deadlines into your schedule for two or more weeks in the future.
- Develop a willingness to bump scheduled tasks as opportunities or crises present themselves.

Greater flexibility won't make your day any less full, but it *will* ensure that you have time to handle the things that matter most.

Once you've developed your schedule, you'll want to periodically check your progress to ensure that you stay on track. In the next Core Concept, you'll discover ways to monitor your time-management system—and continuously improve it.

Check your progress



Once you've begun using your schedule, it's vital to monitor your progress relative to the schedule. That way, you can identify problems and find ways to constantly improve your time-management system.

At least once a day, take stock of how you're doing relative to your schedule. Many managers conduct this review in the morning and at the end of each day. As you review your progress, ask yourself the following questions:

- **"Am I completing the tasks I set for today?"** If not, what's preventing you from doing so? For example, are you underestimating the amount of time tasks need?
- **"Am I making progress toward achieving my goals?"** If not, perhaps you're scheduling too many activities.
- **"Do I feel more focused?"** If not, you may be including too many C-priority tasks in your schedule or failing to cluster similar tasks together.
- **"Can I sustain this schedule?"** If not, you may be using a scheduling tool or system that doesn't suit your personal working style.

Based on your answers to such questions, determine whether you need to make major or minor changes to your time-management system.

Leadership Insight: Priorities

You know, we talk about time management, but you can't manage time. The only thing you can manage is yourself. I was at a conference once and found myself in a hallway talking to a billionaire, somebody whose name I had seen on the cover of magazines. And I realized, starting from this moment—we're here together, and starting from this moment, we're going to both walk off and do stuff.

The stuff that that person is going to do is going to build a multibillion dollar business, and the stuff that I'm going to do is maybe make myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and, if I'm lucky, I might make \$100 today. And I suddenly realized that he had no more time than I did. It's just he used that time differently. So rather than thinking about time management, think about self-management: How is it that you can use your day—how is it that I can use my day—to get the most bang for the moment that we have?

So if I put together a to-do list that has 100 items on it for today, and I'm going to sit down and I'm going to go through my inbox and consider each e-mail message, and so on and so forth, I might get through 200 e-mail messages. And there may be a 201st in my box.

However, if I scan through my e-mail before I start and discover there is one—the 201st—that is absolutely critical to moving my project forward, I can handle that one e-mail and possibly even ignore the other 200, and end up making more progress than if I had tried to do every single e-mail. Because the secret to time management and to organizing your day isn't: do as much as possible, it's: make as much progress as possible.

And to do that, you want to start by looking over what it is that you could do and selecting only the things that will give you the most actual forward movement and the most results for your time spent. Do those first. Then, if you feel like it, do all of the rest of it. But you can't manage time. All you can manage is your decisions about how you're going to spend your day and what you're going to do.

You can't manage time. You can only manage yourself.

Stever Robbins
CEO, Stever Robbins, Inc.

Stever Robbins is an entrepreneur, management consultant, and adjunct lecturer at Babson College in building social capital.

A veteran of nine startups, including FTP Software, Intuit, and HEAR Music, he has helped executives navigate their organizations and themselves through building high-growth companies.

He is an expert on personal productivity and writes and hosts the Get-It-Done Guy podcast on personal productivity.

Stever's work with younger and emerging business leaders includes mentoring high-school students through Junior Achievement, serving as career coach and business plan judge at Harvard Business School, and participating in Boston's Principal for a Day program.

He is the author of two business books, "It Takes a Lot More Than Attitude to Lead a Stellar Organization" and "Get-It-Done Guy's 9 Steps to Work Less and Do More."

Stever holds a bachelor's degree from MIT and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard.

Look for patterns

“ Perhaps the very best question that you can memorize and repeat, over and over, is, 'what is the most valuable use of my time right now?' ”
—Brian Tracy

As you review your progress and think about whether your scheduling system needs improvement, look for patterns in any problems you're experiencing.

For example, if you're having difficulty completing tasks on time, try to uncover what has prevented you from doing so. Common reasons for this particular pattern include:

- Chronically underestimating time required by tasks
- Procrastinating
- Allowing interruptions to steal time
- Leaving too little time open for unanticipated demands

Apply what you've learned

Don't reschedule uncompleted tasks until you've determined *why* you couldn't complete them as planned. Once you've figured out the reason behind scheduling shortfalls, rework future portions of your schedule in ways that reflect what you've learned.

For example, remind yourself to allocate more time for rescheduled activities that you couldn't complete earlier. Or leave more "free time" in your new schedule to accommodate surprises. Or address the causes behind a tendency to procrastinate—such as fear of failure or uncertainty about how to begin tackling a large task.

Ask for ideas

Asking others for their insights is especially valuable if they fall prey to some of the same time-wasters and scheduling problems that are plaguing you. Ask your supervisor, peers, and direct reports what they do to constantly improve the way they're managing their time. People may have come up with creative ideas that you might find useful.

For instance, one manager discovered that his assistant had devised a good strategy for taking advantage of unexpected free time. Here's how the strategy worked: If the assistant suddenly

had *five minutes* available, he used the time to schedule an appointment, write a quick note, or update his daily schedule. If he had *10 minutes* that he hadn't expected, he made a brief phone call, outlined a meeting agenda, responded to e-mail, or planned an upcoming trip.

If he had a *half-hour* free up suddenly, he skimmed a trade journal or business magazine, planned his weekly schedule, outlined notes for a report, or filled out an expense report. The manager began using this strategy—and found it valuable.

Key Idea: Be patient

Key Idea

Like any behavior changes, refining your time-management system takes practice and patience. Start by making small changes. Once you've seen improvements from those changes, try making larger changes. And be willing to adjust your expectations.

For instance, suppose your strategies for improving your scheduling system included reducing catch-up tasks to 5 minutes—but that effort has proved impossible. In this case, consider trying for 10 minutes instead.

In improving their time-management systems, many managers find several challenges daunting. In particular, what should you do if you report to a supervisor who chronically wastes your time by scheduling inefficient meetings or setting unclear expectations? And how might you create a scheduling system that enables you to balance your work *and* personal life?

As with most skills, time management isn't mastered overnight.

Key Idea: Clarify your goals with your boss

Key Idea

Unfortunately, some bosses unknowingly create time-wasting impediments for their direct reports. This problem can arise from confused goals, lack of clear directions, unnecessary meetings, and work bottlenecks in the boss's office. You can combat these situations.

If you and your supervisor haven't agreed on goals, connected them to time frames, and ensured that your goals support the company's strategy, then you can't define a coherent set of tasks or create a schedule for them.

This can be avoided by taking the following actions:

- Ask for a meeting with your boss to discuss your goals. Set goals for the coming year and the next six months.
- Ensure that the goals are specific, linked to time frames, measurable, and aligned with your unit's and your company's objectives.
- Be sure that you'll be rewarded—not penalized—for working toward your assigned goals.

- Assess your ability to accomplish the goals. If you lack the necessary skills and resources, ask for additional training or resources.
- Put your goals in writing.
- Finally, meet with your boss at regular intervals to discuss your progress and make any necessary adjustments to your goals.

Make sure you and your boss have the same expectations to avoid extra work and disappointing results.

Get clear directions on your boss's preferences

Does your boss ask you to handle projects without communicating his or her preferences for how the work should get done? One manager, for example, completed a report his boss had asked him to do—then discovered that the supervisor had wanted the document formatted in a different way.

When supervisors have specific preferences but don't communicate them clearly to their direct reports, employees often waste time redoing the work to satisfy their supervisors. The following process can help you correct this situation:

1. When your boss asks you to handle a project, draft a preliminary plan for how you intend to approach the task.
2. Meet with your supervisor and say, "This is how I plan to approach this project. What do you think?"
3. Incorporate your boss's feedback into a revised plan.
4. Get feedback on the new version of the plan.
5. Repeat until your boss approves your plan.

If you use this process consistently, your boss will eventually realize that he or she can save time by being more specific the first time the work is assigned to you. As a result, your boss may develop a new and better way of assigning work to you.

Combat pointless meetings

Some bosses organize time-wasting meetings. For example, one executive routinely took phone calls during meetings. Another forced meeting participants to go through the motions of reaching consensus—even though he had already determined the desired outcome.

Like any meeting, those organized by your supervisor need to be well-organized, have compact agendas, include all the right people, and end with a decision or action assignments. Meeting participants should feel that their time is being well spent and that they are contributing to *and* benefiting from the meeting.

If your boss's meetings don't fit this description, do whatever you can to either change or make the best of the situation. For example:

- Before the meeting begins, ask to make alterations to the agenda that would sharpen the focus of the meeting. Explain to your boss why you're suggesting the changes.
- Respectfully express your concerns about the way meetings are being handled. Note the costs of unnecessary meetings in terms of your ability to achieve the goals that you and your boss

agreed to.

- If your supervisor can't be dissuaded from taking phone calls or allowing other lengthy distractions during meetings, bring extra work with you that you can complete during these incidents. At least you'll get *something* accomplished.

Remove bottlenecks

Some supervisors need to approve everything before allowing their employees to take the next steps in completing a task. Not surprisingly, such bosses often don't have time to respond in a timely fashion to the many decisions that they'd like to make. Tasks get bottlenecked in the boss's office, and initiatives grind to a halt.

To open up such bottlenecks, use this process:

1. Assess the productivity losses incurred by the bottleneck.
2. Meet with your boss to discuss your findings and to seek remedies.
3. Develop remedies that your boss can live with. For instance, identify tasks that *can* proceed without passing through the bottleneck. Or urge your supervisor to delegate approval authority to you or someone else for less critical tasks.

Most supervisors have a great interest in promoting efficiency. By communicating the problem and pointing out its costs, you may be able to persuade your boss to relinquish some control.

Consider how you might be wasting your supervisor's time

It's easy to complain about time-wasting bosses—and hard to see how your own behavior might be wasting your supervisor's time. To respect your boss's time constraints:

- Avoid requesting his or her intervention too often, if you or one of your direct reports could accomplish the task without your boss's help.
- Don't bring problems to your boss to handle. Instead, bring proposed solutions, and seek his or her feedback.
- Accommodate your boss's work style. For example, if he or she prefers to receive information in writing rather than in person, honor those preferences.

And of course, as a boss yourself, be sure to watch for time-wasting behaviors when dealing with your own direct reports. You don't want *them* to use up valuable time figuring out how to correct *your* habits.

In the next section, you'll examine another major challenge for time-pressed managers today: balancing work and personal life.

Activity: Contributing to a time-efficient culture

In your organization, are you a positive influence for time-efficiency?

Jessie has scheduled a meeting with you to discuss a project. Before accepting the meeting you should:

- ☐ Put together a meeting outline

Not the best choice. A meeting outline is helpful in keeping a meeting on track. However, before you can decide whether this meeting is a good use of your time, you'll need to review the agenda.

- ☐ Determine the availability of your team to work on a new project

Not the best choice. Once you've decided a project is appropriate for your team, you can determine how to prioritize the work. First, however, you'll need to review the agenda to determine whether Jessie's proposed meeting is an appropriate use of your time.

- ☐ Ask for an agenda

Correct choice. Before you can decide whether this meeting is a good use of your time, you'll need to review the agenda.

Henry just assigned a new project to Felicity, a direct report. When he meets to discuss the project with her he should:

- ☐ Outline the broad goals of the project, listen to her thoughts, and ask her to check in with him when she has a concrete plan for proceeding

Not the best choice. In addition to giving Felicity an overview of the project, he should also outline his expectations and any constraints or parameters he has for completing the project.

- ☐ Discuss the project with Felicity. If he finds her initial ideas satisfactory, he should ask her to check back after the initial stages are complete.

Not the best choice. In addition to giving Felicity an overview of the project, Henry should describe his expectations and define any parameters he has for completing the project.

- ☐ Outline the broad goals of the project, as well as define his parameters and expectations. He should also consider her ideas and perspective on how best the project can be completed.

Correct choice. By discussing the full outline of the project as well as his expectations, Henry gives Felicity a clear idea of how to proceed. It's also helpful to listen to her ideas and perspective, and to correct any misunderstanding before she begins work.

Do you have a problem?



Is your work life "bleeding" into your personal life, so that you have less time to get together with friends and family, fulfill community commitments, and explore personal interests? If so, you're not alone.

Why are there so many demands on your personal time? Several reasons:

- **More engaging jobs.** Many jobs have become more engaging and mentally stimulating. Numerous businesspeople have found themselves willing to invest more time and energy in their work lives—sometimes to the detriment of their home lives.
- **Communication advances.** With communication advances such as e-mail, people often find themselves checking and returning work-related messages from home during evenings, weekends, and even vacations.
- **More work.** As companies face tougher competition, many are piling so much work on their employees that people are staying longer at the office or taking work home.

Key Idea: Take control of your personal time

Key Idea

Letting your work life eclipse your personal life isn't healthy. To keep both sides of your life in balance, you may need to take control of your personal time. Use a process similar to the one you use to manage your time at work:

1. Clarify your personal goals.

Do you want to learn to play the violin? Or master Italian cooking? What goals would be most fulfilling for you *and* accommodate the goals and preferences of the important people in your life? You probably have more personal goals than you have time to devote to them.

For example, if a vacation is your most important goal, completing a garden project may have to wait. So, prioritize your goals.

2. Identify tasks you must complete to achieve your highest goals.

Consider the example of the vacation:

- At work you might need to schedule the time off well ahead of the actual trip. You may also need to make arrangements for someone to handle your projects while you're away.

- At home you may have to hire a house- or pet-sitter, or ask a neighbor to temporarily manage a volunteering project you've committed to.

3. Schedule your tasks and goals.

Book the two-week vacation. Add "Talk with boss about vacation" to your to-do list —then do it as planned.

- Don't schedule your personal time so tightly that you can't respond to unanticipated events and opportunities.
- If you have inadequate open space on your calendar, create an activity log for your personal time. Analyze your log to see whether you're wasting lots of time on activities that don't support your highest personal goals.

Don't let your personal life evaporate. Practice balancing your work and personal goals.

Seek opportunities to free up personal time

Often, people can free up significant personal time with just a few straightforward practices. For example:

- **Evaluate relationships.** Do you have a friendship or an intimate relationship that is so unhealthy or one-sided that it drains you of time and emotional energy, while returning little or nothing of value to you? If so, consider ending such relationships. You'll free up time and energy to invest in healthier, more fulfilling bonds.
- **Build energy.** By eating right and engaging in a long-term program to improve physical fitness, you can build stamina. These deeper reserves of energy can help you attack goals with greater vitality and speed, freeing up time for additional important activities.
- **Evaluate community commitments.** Are your commitments generating real value for you and others? Are the benefits you receive from them commensurate with the value you provide to others? If you answer no to these questions, consider eliminating these commitments and spending time on more important activities.
- **Reduce clutter.** Material possessions absorb time. You have to organize them, find places to store them, clean and maintain them, and so forth. By getting rid of any possessions you don't need or use, you'll free up time for other, more important things.

When you successfully manage your work and personal time, you become a helpful model to colleagues, friends, family, and direct reports.

Use technology to reduce travel time



Do your direct reports travel often to give sales presentations, participate in training programs, conduct focus groups, or engage in other business-related activities? Several technologies can help reduce the expensive costs associated with travel.

- **Videoconferencing.** This technology enables remote meeting participants to see and hear one another. It requires special equipment and is usually conducted from a specially equipped conference room.
- **Web conferencing.** With this technology, people in different locations can view and share documents and, with Web cameras, see one another on their computer monitors.
- **Online training.** This technology makes learning available 24/7. Participants can squeeze training into open periods in their schedules without displacing mission-critical tasks.

To select the best technologies for reducing travel, identify the most promising applications for your group—for example, Web conference meetings among virtual team members. With your IT department, run a few pilot conferences. Apply lessons learned to a larger rollout.

Facilitate work/life balance

Employees who balance their work and home lives have far more energy and feel more loyal to their company than those who let their work lives consume them completely. To help your people achieve this balance:

- **Emphasize results more than how, where, and when work gets done.** You'll enable direct reports to schedule their time in ways that make the best use of their energy.
- **Acknowledge that people have home lives.** Merely showing an interest in employees as individuals with interests, families, and civic obligations reinforces the importance of balancing work and personal life—and boosts morale and motivation.
- **Encourage more efficient ways of working.** For example, if those 4:00 p.m. staff meetings always seem to drag on until 6:30 p.m., reschedule them as lunch meetings. You'll get the job done *and* get people home on time.
- **Consider teleworking.** By reducing commuting time and letting parents be home when kids return from school, teleworking—working from home or a satellite office—can greatly improve employees' work/life balance. Moreover, teleworkers are generally more productive, put in longer hours, and feel more loyal to their companies than on-site employees. To make the most of teleworking, identify jobs most appropriate for telework. Ensure that teleworkers have the right qualities, such as the ability to work alone and unsupervised. Focus on results, not activities. Set clear goals and monitor progress. And integrate teleworkers with the rest of your direct reports.
- **Create flexible work schedules.** Some employees could work from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM in order to drive their children to school in the morning. Others could work 60-hour weeks during a seasonally busy time and 30-hour weeks the rest of the year. Still others could put in 40 hours

Monday through Thursday to devote Friday to community or family commitments, or invest time in a special vocation.

- **Provide time-saving perks.** On-site daycare, medical care, and concierge services, such as dry cleaning, can help ease pressure on employees' personal time. If your company doesn't provide these services, see whether the executives in charge of such policies would be open to considering them.

Teach time management

Time management is a skill that requires practice and patience. Consider offering training in time-management principles and practices, either through online learning or traditional seminars.

But don't expect that merely attending a course or working through an online seminar will be enough. You need to help your employees internalize what they've learned and translate it into permanent new behaviors. To do that:

- Talk with your direct reports about what they've learned regarding time management. Encourage them to talk with each other and share ideas.
- Suggest that employees create and use activity logs, analyze their use of time, and come up with ideas for improving their time management. Share your own logs and findings to provide an example.
- Talk frequently with people about their goals, and explain that clarifying goals is the starting point for time management.
- Help your direct reports develop schedules and use to-do lists effectively.

By practicing good time-management skills yourself, you can serve as an example to your direct reports. And by encouraging them to constantly practice and strengthen their skills, you help them make better use of their time—which benefits your company overall.

Overview

This section provides interactive exercises so you can practice what you've learned. These exercises are self-checks only; your answers will not be used to evaluate your performance in the topic.

Scenario

Assume the role of a manager in a fictional situation and explore different outcomes based on your choices (5-10 minutes).

Check Your Knowledge

Assess your understanding of key points by completing a 10-question quiz (10 minutes).

Scenario: Part 1

Part 1

Sharlene manages a small accounts payable team at a large manufacturing firm. She has too many things to do, and is under pressure to get everything done "yesterday." Her four direct

reports are equally busy, so they can't help lighten her load.

Sharlene fears she will fall behind. She notices the stack of payment-processing forms on her desk awaiting her review and sign-off. It's an important task, and easier than most of the other things she has to do. Sharlene thinks about all she has on her plate: evaluate several prospective account management programs, conduct performance reviews, streamline her group's filing system, and start a search for a new hire. She has a big block of time available now to tackle any of these responsibilities. But where to start?

What should Sharlene do first?

- Determine which is the biggest task and complete it first. She can fit in smaller tasks whenever she has time.

Not the best choice.

Jumping right into the most time-consuming or challenging task isn't the best way to manage your time. A *difficult* task isn't necessarily an *important* one. Rate tasks' importance according to how strongly they relate to your goals and priorities, not how easy or difficult they are.

- Determine which is the easiest task and complete it first so that she'll be able to focus on the more challenging tasks.

Not the best choice.

Getting smaller tasks out of the way before moving on to larger ones isn't the best way to manage your time. This approach provides a sense of accomplishment and lets you cross items off your to-do list—which can feel very rewarding. But a better approach would be to prioritize tasks based on how well each supports your goals.

- Determine what her goals are and use them to generate a list of specific tasks, prioritized by importance.

Correct choice.

By relating tasks to goals and then prioritizing those tasks by importance, you always know what your priorities are. You may find some tasks that you can eliminate or assign to others. Otherwise, you may end up spending your day performing urgent or easy tasks that do not help you achieve your top goals.

Scenario: Part 2

Part 2

Sharlene identifies three goals: managing her staff, creating and maintaining efficient work processes for her group, and ensuring timely payment of all invoices. She then relates each of her tasks to one of these goals, and prioritizes her tasks by importance.

Sharlene's manager, Al, asks her to put together a spreadsheet detailing the payment turnaround time of each of her direct reports. He has the raw data, but would find the information more useful if Sharlene could compile it for a report he's writing. He wants the spreadsheet by the end of the week. Sharlene is happy to create the spreadsheet, but knows she doesn't have enough time to work on it and still complete everything else she has to do.

What should Sharlene do?

- Create the spreadsheet. If it's important to Al, it's important to her.

Not the best choice.

Pressure from above often causes people to shift their priorities for the wrong reasons. Instead, Sharlene should ask Al to help her prioritize based on the goals that he and she have agreed are most important to her job. Prioritizing helps you focus your time and energy on your most important responsibilities. It also helps you determine which tasks you should *not* pursue. Ask yourself, "*Does this activity help me achieve my goals?*" If the answer is no, the activity does not belong on your schedule.

- Explain the tasks on her plate and how they relate to her goals, and ask Al what she should do, given that this spreadsheet does not relate directly to her goals.

Correct choice.

This is a good example of prioritizing based on goals rather than on what is most pressing. While you sometimes need to factor time pressure into decisions about which tasks to pursue, you must weigh that time pressure against each task's alignment with your goals.

It can be difficult to say no to a manager. If your tasks are prioritized according to an established list of goals, you can use that list to explain your time to your manager and present the trade-offs involved in taking your time away from goal-oriented activities. That way, you don't have to say no to your manager, but you can ask your manager to help you prioritize. Your manager may see that a request is not the best use of your time.

- Agree to write the report, but caution Al that she may not be able to finish it by the end of the week, given everything else she has to do.

Not the best choice.

Agreeing to take on a task that she may not be able to complete in time does not help Sharlene manage her time. She will feel pressure to complete this task, since her manager made the request. And she'll shift her priorities away from tasks that more directly support her goals.

Learn to say no to nonpriority projects, even when presented by management. List the projects you are currently working on and ask the requester to help you prioritize when he or she adds new projects to your responsibilities.

Scenario: Part 3

Part 3

Sharlene assigned priorities to the various tasks needed to achieve specific goals. Based on this, she created a to-do list and schedule. However, she finds that she's not completing things as efficiently as she had thought she would. As a result, she's falling behind again.

What should she do to get her schedule back on track?

- Identify ways she has been spending time that don't help her complete tasks. Then brainstorm how to control the time wasters and focus on the tasks at hand.

Correct choice.

A time waster is anything that keeps you from doing things that have more value and importance to you. For example, a chat with a colleague might be a time waster. Identify your time wasters, and then develop strategies for dealing with them.

For each time waster, brainstorm strategies to eliminate them. Let your colleagues know you're trying to control your time wasters, and enlist their support. Maybe they'll try to do the same thing.

- Eliminate low-priority tasks. They aren't as important, and it's better to get the high-priority tasks completed on time. She can always do the low-priority tasks later.

Not the best choice.

Eliminating low-priority tasks is not the answer. Instead, Sharlene should eliminate activities that prevent her from completing her scheduled tasks.

To control time wasters, figure out why you are unable to stay on schedule. Look at how you spend your time, and what keeps you from completing tasks. Once you have identified time wasters, you can create strategies for eliminating them. You'll get your schedule back on track—without having to eliminate tasks.

- Place a "Do Not Disturb" sign on her door and ignore phone calls and e-mails until she has completed the tasks. Use the sign judiciously, but ask co-workers to take it seriously.

Not the best choice.

Simply putting up a "Do Not Disturb" sign and ignoring phone calls and e-mails is not the best way to send the message that you're busy. Instead, explain to co-workers that you are working on controlling time wasters and enlist their support. Then use your time more efficiently. For example, screen telephone calls, or refer callers to someone else.

Scenario: Conclusion

Conclusion

Sharlene has discovered how to prioritize her tasks, organize her time, and identify and control time wasters. Now she needs to monitor her progress, and revise her time-management strategies when necessary. Time management is an ongoing task. Once you've prioritized tasks and set a schedule, continue to check your progress against the schedule. Ask yourself whether you are completing your tasks on time and working toward achieving your goals. If not, determine why not. Then review your tasks to ensure that they support your most important goals.

Activity: Check Your Knowledge: Question 1

What is the first step in managing your time more effectively?

- Analyzing how you spend your time

Not the best choice.

This is a later step in managing your time more effectively. The first step in the process is identifying and prioritizing your goals. Once you've identified and prioritized your goals, you break them into manageable tasks, analyze how you're currently spending your time, recognize common time-wasters, schedule your time in more effective ways, and monitor and improve your time-management strategies.

- Identifying and prioritizing your goals

Correct choice.

Once you've identified and prioritized your goals, you break them into manageable tasks, analyze how you're currently spending your time, recognize common time-wasters, schedule your time in more effective ways, and monitor and improve your time-management strategies.

- [Recognizing common time-wasters](#)

Not the best choice.

This is a later step in managing your time more effectively, not the first step. The first step in the process is identifying and prioritizing your goals. Once you've identified and prioritized your goals, you break them into manageable tasks, analyze how you're currently spending your time, recognize common time-wasters, schedule your time in more effective ways, and monitor and improve your time-management strategies.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 2

In identifying your goals, you've defined one goal that creates a more desirable business condition in the long run or takes advantage of a business opportunity. What type of goal is this?

- [Enabling](#)

Correct choice.

Enabling goals are your second most important goals. Enabling goals and critical goals (which must be accomplished for your department or team to operate successfully and support the company's high-level objectives) are the most crucial goals and should guide the way you manage your time.

- [Critical](#)

Not the best choice.

A critical goal must be accomplished for your department or team to operate successfully and support the company's high-level objectives. It's not a goal that creates a more desirable business condition in the long run or takes advantage of a business opportunity. A goal that does these things is an enabling goal. Critical and enabling goals are the most crucial goals and should guide the way you manage your time.

- [Nice-to-have](#)

Not the best choice.

A nice-to-have goal enhances your business—by making activities faster, easier, or more appealing. It's not a goal that creates a more desirable business condition in the long run or takes advantage of a business opportunity. A goal that does these things is an enabling goal. Critical and enabling goals are the most crucial goals and should guide the way you manage your time.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 3

In breaking your goals into manageable tasks, you assign A, B, and C priorities to each task, depending on whether the task supports a critical, enabling, or nice-to-have goal. And you estimate the time required to complete each task. What else do you do?

- Estimate the financial resources you'll need to complete each task

Not the best choice.

Estimating financial resources is not part of breaking goals into manageable tasks. The other step you need to take is to determine which tasks are sequential and which ones are not. With sequential tasks, each one needs to be finished before the next task can begin. For example, to submit a written report, you need to gather data, outline the report, write the report, circulate the draft for comment, and submit the final draft. Nonsequential tasks are those that don't follow a linear sequence. For example, if you're coordinating development of a new computer system, the software developers may need to wait until some, but not all, of the hardware is developed. After that point, much of the two groups' work can be done in parallel.

- Begin logging the tasks into a schedule

Not the best choice.

Logging tasks into a schedule is not part of breaking goals into manageable tasks. The other step you need to take is to determine which tasks are sequential and which ones are not. With sequential tasks, each one needs to be finished before the next task can begin. For example, to submit a written report, you need to gather data, outline the report, write the report, circulate the draft for comment, and submit the final draft. Nonsequential tasks are those that don't follow a linear sequence. For example, if you're coordinating development of a new computer system, the software developers may need to wait until some, but not all, of the hardware is developed. After that point, much of the two groups' work can be done in parallel.

- Determine which tasks are sequential and which ones are not

Correct choice.

With sequential tasks, each one needs to be finished before the next task can begin. For example, to submit a written report, you need to gather data, outline the report, write the report, circulate the draft for comment, and submit the final draft.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 4

You've begun using an activity log. In it, you've listed every activity you've engaged in as you've done it. You've indicated how much time you spent on each activity. And, you've assigned priorities to each activity in your log, based on whether activities support your critical, enabling, or nice-to-have goals. What information have you omitted from your log?

- You need to write down whether specific activities achieved the desired outcome.

Not the best choice.

Whether specific activities achieved the desired outcome is not information that needs to be captured in your activity log. Instead, you need to label each entry with a specific category, such as "e-mail," "paperwork," and "phone." By labeling each entry, you can begin analyzing what kinds of activities are consuming most of your time and where certain kinds of activities are clustering during your day. This enables you to identify patterns in your time usage and determine whether those patterns match your most important objectives.

- You need to label each entry with a specific category, such as "e-mail," "paperwork," and "phone."

Correct choice.

By labeling each entry, you can begin analyzing what kinds of activities are consuming most of your time and where certain kinds of activities are clustering during your day. This enables you to identify patterns in your time usage and determine whether those patterns match your most important objectives.

- You need to record whether activities were left uncompleted from the day before.

Not the best choice.

Whether activities were left uncompleted from the day before is not information that needs to be captured in your activity log. Instead, you need to label each entry with a specific category, such as "e-mail," "paperwork," and "phone." By labeling each entry, you can begin analyzing what kinds of activities are consuming most of your time and where certain kinds of activities are clustering during your day. This enables you to identify patterns in your time usage and determine whether those patterns match your most important objectives.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 5

While analyzing your activity log, you've realized that you often procrastinate. What would you do first to defeat this time-waster?

- Ask your boss whether the procrastinated tasks *have to be done*

Not the best choice.

While you may want to eventually ask your boss whether procrastinated tasks have to be done, this isn't the first thing you should do to defeat this time-waster. Instead, your first step would be to understand the cause of the procrastination. People procrastinate for various reasons. For example, they fear failure, are uncertain about where to begin, and find the tasks in question unpleasant or uninteresting. By understanding what's causing you to procrastinate, you can then take steps to correct the problem. For example, you could ask your boss whether the procrastinated tasks have to be done, delegate the tasks to someone who can get the job done, or get on with the job (since activity can help dispel fear of failure).

- Delegate procrastinated tasks to someone who can get the job done

Not the best choice.

While you may want to eventually delegate procrastinated tasks to someone who can get the job done, this isn't the first thing you should do defeat this time-waster. Instead, your first step would be to understand the cause of the procrastination. People procrastinate for various reasons. For example, they fear failure, are uncertain about where to begin, and find the tasks in question unpleasant or uninteresting. By understanding what's causing you to procrastinate, you can then take steps to correct the problem. For example, you could ask your boss whether the procrastinated tasks have to be done, delegate the tasks to someone who can get the job done, or get on with the job (since activity can help dispel fear of failure).

- [Understand the cause of the procrastination](#)

Correct choice.

People procrastinate for various reasons. For example, they fear failure, are uncertain about where to begin, and find the tasks in question unpleasant or uninteresting. By understanding what's causing you to procrastinate, you can take steps to correct the problem. For instance, you could get on with the job despite your fear of failure, because activity can help dispel fear.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 6

You're creating a new schedule based on your analysis of your time use and your goals. Which of the following strategies would you use?

- [Leave some blocks of time unscheduled to accommodate unexpected events](#)

Correct choice.

Leaving blocks of time unscheduled can help you build flexibility into your schedule—which is important in many managerial positions. Additional strategies for building flexibility include being willing to bump scheduled tasks as opportunities or crises present themselves, and entering only the most critical tasks and deadlines into your schedule for two or more weeks into the future.

- [Schedule meetings back-to-back, to avoid switching costs](#)

Not the best choice.

When developing a schedule, you should not arrange meetings back-to-back. You need time after each meeting to process the information.

Instead, you would want to leave some blocks of time unscheduled, to accommodate unexpected events. This practice can help you build flexibility into your schedule—which is important in many managerial positions. Additional strategies for building flexibility include being willing to bump scheduled tasks as opportunities or crises present themselves, and entering only the most critical tasks and deadlines into your schedule for two or more weeks into the future.

- [Schedule C-priority tasks first, allocating them to low-energy periods during the day](#)

Not the best choice.

When developing a schedule, you should not enter C-priority tasks first. Since C-priority tasks have little value, you should schedule them last.

Instead, you would want to leave some blocks of time unscheduled, to accommodate unexpected events. This practice can help you build flexibility into your schedule—which is important in many managerial positions. Additional strategies for building flexibility include being willing to bump scheduled tasks as opportunities or crises present themselves, and entering only the most critical tasks and deadlines into your schedule for two or more weeks into the future.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 7

You want to monitor and improve your time-management system. How often should you take stock of how you're doing relative to your schedule?

- **At least once a day**

Correct choice.

Many managers review their progress relative to their schedule in the morning and at the end of each day. As they review, they ask whether they're completing the tasks they set for the day. They also look for patterns in any problems they experience—such as chronically underestimating how much time tasks will require. They then fine-tune their schedule to address those problems.

- **Once a week, ideally on Monday morning**

Not the best choice.

Once a week is not frequent enough. You would want to review your progress relative to your schedule at least once a day. Many managers conduct this review in the morning and at the end of each day. As they review, they ask whether they're completing the tasks they set for the day. They also look for patterns in any problems they experience—such as chronically underestimating how much time tasks will require. They then fine-tune their schedule to address those problems.

- **Once a month, ideally at the beginning of the month**

Not the best choice.

Once a month is not frequent enough. You would want to review your progress relative to your schedule at least once a day. Many managers conduct this review in the morning and at the end of each day. As they review, they ask whether they're completing the tasks they set for the day. They also look for patterns in any problems they experience—such as chronically underestimating how much time tasks will require. They then fine-tune their schedule to address those problems.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 8

Bosses can waste their direct reports' time in several ways, such as failing to clarify goals or conducting poorly facilitated meetings. But direct reports can also waste their bosses' time. What is a strategy you could use to avoid wasting your boss's time?

- "Train" your boss to receive information in written form, which is the most efficient communication channel

Not the best choice.

Training your boss to receive information in written form won't prevent you from wasting your boss's time if he or she prefers to receive information in another form, such as in person or by e-mail.

It would be better to bring proposed solutions to problems to your boss and ask for his or her feedback. By taking this approach, you resist the urge to unload problems on your boss. It takes far less time for your boss to comment on your proposed solution to a problem than to develop and implement a solution him- or herself.

- Bring proposed solutions to problems to your boss and ask for his or her feedback

Correct choice.

By taking this approach, you resist the urge to unload problems on your boss. It takes far less time for your boss to comment on your proposed solution to a problem than to develop and implement a solution him- or herself.

- Cluster your requests for your boss's intervention into specific portions of the workday

Not the best choice.

Clustering your requests for your boss's intervention into specific portions of the workday won't prevent you from wasting your boss's time if he or she has other commitments scheduled for that time.

It would be better to bring proposed solutions to problems to your boss and ask for his or her feedback. By taking this approach, you resist the urge to unload problems on your boss. It takes far less time for your boss to comment on your proposed solution to a problem than to develop and implement a solution him- or herself.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 9

You've found that you have less and less time available for personal goals. What is the *best* strategy you could use to free up personal time?

- Reduce the time you spend exercising, so you can spend more time prioritizing your personal goals

Not the best choice.

Reducing or eliminating exercise may cause you to have less energy to tackle your goals. A better strategy would be to eliminate community or neighborhood commitments that don't generate real value for you and others. If the benefits you receive from community commitments aren't commensurate with the value you provide to others, such commitments are a poor use of your personal time. By eliminating them or scaling them back, you can free up time to spend on more important activities.

- [Plan a two-week vacation](#)

Not the best choice.

Though a two-week vacation may be rejuvenating, it doesn't help you free up personal time on a regular, day-to-day basis. A better strategy would be to eliminate community or neighborhood commitments that don't generate real value for you and others. If the benefits you receive from community commitments aren't commensurate with the value you provide to others, such commitments are a poor use of your personal time. By eliminating them or scaling them back, you can free up time to spend on more important activities.

- [Eliminate community or neighborhood commitments that don't generate real value for you and others](#)

Correct choice.

If the benefits you receive from community commitments aren't commensurate with the value you provide to others, such commitments are a poor use of your personal time. By eliminating them or scaling them back, you can free up time to spend on more important activities.

Check Your Knowledge: Question 10

Employees who balance their work and home lives have far more energy and feel more loyal to their organization than those who let their work lives consume them completely. Of the choices below, which is the best step you can take to help your direct reports achieve this balance?

- [Advise employees on how, where, and when they can best accomplish their work](#)

Not the best choice.

Advising employees on how, where, and when they can best accomplish their work doesn't help them achieve balance, because it doesn't take into account their non-work obligations. A more effective step would be to acknowledge that your direct reports are human beings who have personal lives. Merely showing an interest in employees as individuals with interests, families, and civic obligations reinforces the importance of balancing work and personal life—and boosts your direct reports' morale and motivation.

- [Acknowledge that your direct reports are human beings who have home lives](#)

Correct choice.

Merely showing an interest in employees as individuals with interests, families, and civic obligations reinforces the importance of balancing work and personal life—and boosts your direct reports' morale and motivation.

- [Create a standardized workday, such as 8:30 AM-5:00 PM, to introduce consistency](#)

Not the best choice.

Creating a standardized workday doesn't help employees achieve balance, because some employees may have nonwork obligations that require them to work a different schedule. A more

effective step would be to acknowledge that your direct reports are human beings who have personal lives. Merely showing an interest in employees as individuals with interests, families, and civic obligations reinforces the importance of balancing work and personal life—and boosts your direct reports' morale and motivation.

Check Your Knowledge: Results

Your score:

Steps for managing your time

1. Identify and prioritize your goals

- Review your organizational and departmental or unit goals.
- Assign a priority to each goal. A priorities are critical goals: You must accomplish them to run your department or unit successfully. B priorities are enabling goals: They create a more desirable business condition in the long run or take advantage of a business opportunity. C priorities are nice-to-have goals: They enhance your business but don't necessary revolutionize it.
- Distinguish between urgent tasks (those demanding immediate attention) and crucial tasks (those that support your critical goals). Not all urgent tasks are crucial.

2. Break your goals into manageable tasks.

- Break each goal into the key tasks required to achieve the goal.
- Prioritize each task as A (supports your critical goals), B (supports your enabling goals), or C (urgent and non-urgent tasks with little value or importance).
- Sequence tasks in the order in which they must be accomplished to achieve the related goal.
- Estimate how much time each task requires to complete.
- Establish a deadline for completing each task.

3. Analyze how you're currently spending your time.

- Create an activity log for a week, listing every activity you engage in, how much time each activity takes, and what category the activity falls into (e-mail, paperwork, phone, etc.)
- Assign a priority to each activity in your log. A priorities involve your critical goals; B priorities, your enabling goals; C priorities, your nice-to-have goals.
- Analyze the log to see what kinds of activities are consuming most of your time, and whether you're using time in ways that support your most important objectives.
- Identify ways to improve your use of time. Seek the causes underlying time mismanagement, such as attending unnecessary meetings because you feel that you won't be seen as a team player if you don't attend.

4. Recognize and defeat common "time-wasters."

- Watch for common "time-wasters," such as procrastinating, schedule overloading, and unnecessary travel.
- Develop strategies for defeating time-wasters; for example, delegating unpleasant tasks to combat procrastination, learning to say no to peers and direct reports to fight schedule overloading, and considering alternatives to unnecessary travel.

5. Schedule your time more effectively.

- Make use of scheduling tools, such as "to-do" lists, appointment calendars, and daily or weekly planners.
- Develop your schedule: Enter tasks into it and indicate the time frames in which you expect to complete the tasks.
- Block off some "free time" in your schedule to accommodate unexpected events and opportunities.

6. Monitor and improve your time-management strategies.

- At least once a day, take stock of how you're doing relative to your schedule.
- Look for patterns, such as chronic procrastinating or underestimating time required by tasks.
- Fine-tune your time-management method by reworking portions of your schedule based on what you've learned about your use of time.

Steps for saying no to your boss

1. Avoid saying anything definite when your boss asks you take on a task not related to your agreed-upon goals.

If your boss asks you take on a project that doesn't directly support your agreed-upon goals, resist the urge to say "Okay" or "No" at the time of the request.

For example, Joe, a regional sales manager, is asked by his boss, Walter, to study the impact of a competing product on their company's sales. Walter asks Joe to gather information from sales reps throughout the country—within the next few months. Joe agrees that the competing product has become more popular with customers, but says nothing more for a few moments.

2. Buy time to think through your response.

Find a way to gain time to devise a response.

For example, Joe says to Walter, "The study is a great idea. If there's a trend toward use of this competing product, we need to know about it. Would you mind if I gave this some thought between now and tomorrow afternoon?" Walter agrees, saying, "Sure. Let's talk again tomorrow at 2:00 PM."

3. Use your bought time to prepare a response.

Develop a response to your boss's request.

For example, Joe decides to let Walter know that he agrees the company must analyze the trends regarding the competing product, and that it's important to measure the competing product's impact on their company's sales. Joe also decides to come up with some alternative strategies for accomplishing this objective.

4. Meet with your boss and explain how the added project might jeopardize your goals.

Arrange a meeting with your boss to discuss your high-priority goals. Explain the potential negative impact of the proposed project on your ability to achieve your agreed-upon objectives.

For example, at the meeting with Walter, Joe says, "I agree that we need to understand the impact of this competing product, and soon. But let's take stock of what's already on my plate. We're just entering our busiest sales season, and I have three inexperienced

sales reps to train. You've given me a sales target of \$20 million for the year, and I'm committed to it. But I won't hit that target if I divert my attention to this project at this critical time. So I'd like to propose an alternative."

5. Propose a reasonable alternative.

Present an alternative plan that will enable your boss to get what he or she wants—and enable you to achieve your most important agreed-upon goals.

For example, Joe tells Walter, "Here's what I suggest as an alternative: Let's revisit this project three months from today, after the busy season. In the meantime, I'll ask Sheila Evans in market research to develop a plan for capturing the data. How does that sound?"

Note that Joe hasn't said "No" outright to Walter. Instead, he restated his assigned goals and his commitment to them. He then explained in concrete terms why the added work suggested by Walter would jeopardize his goals. Finally, he offered a reasonable alternative and asked his boss to decide how he should spend his time.

Tips for delegating

- Recognize signs that your delegating skills need sharpening—for example, your in-box is always full, you're regularly working overtime on tasks that "only you can do," and you frequently intervene in projects assigned to others.
- When delegating, be very clear on what you want done and when and how results will be measured.
- Encourage direct reports to tell you about time they have available for new projects.
- Build a sense of shared responsibility for your unit's overall goals. Your direct reports will be more interested in taking on new projects.
- Avoid dumping only tedious or difficult jobs on your employees—delegate tasks that spark interest and enjoyment as well.
- Provide career opportunities for others by delegating functions that have high visibility in the company.
- Offer training or coaching as needed to help people successfully handle delegated work.
- Develop trust in less-skilled staff members by delegating very structured assignments first. Then provide the support they need to increase their competence.
- Whenever possible, delegate an entire project or function, not just a small piece. You'll increase direct reports' motivation and commitment.
- Monitor progress and provide feedback.
- Maintain open lines of communication: "Let me know if you run into problems."

Tips for making the most of your travel time

- Take along enough paperwork to turn wasted time in terminals and taxis into productive time.
- Be thoroughly prepared for meetings you'll be participating in at your destination.
- Use plane trips for quiet contemplation: Plan, brainstorm new ideas, or catch up on news.
- Make the most of your travel days. If you have a morning meeting at your destination, spend the rest of the day visiting with customers or business partners.

Tips for getting the most from meetings

- Make sure each meeting has an agenda; distribute the agenda to meeting participants in advance so people can prepare.
- Start meetings on time, even if some participants are late. If you wait for them to arrive before starting, you'll reinforce the message that it's okay to be late. People won't have an incentive to be more prompt.
- Don't allow meetings to turn into chat sessions. Steer the conversation back to the agenda as soon as it gets off track.
- Ensure that one or two participants don't dominate a meeting. You want to get input from everyone in order to make the best use of the time.
- Take steps to prevent meetings from running over schedule.
- Make sure meetings end with decisions or commitments from participants to take specific actions.
- Hold participants accountable for their action assignments.

Tips for using telework effectively

- Decide which jobs are most appropriate for telework.
- Consider legal, regulatory, insurance, and technology issues.
- Devise ways to supervise teleworkers to ensure accountability for results.
- Address any concerns that telework will negatively affect employees' chances for promotions and other recognition.
- Ensure that teleworkers have the right characteristics: enough job knowledge and experience, ability to plan and manage projects and to set and reach goals, ability to work with a minimum of supervision, and a willingness to try new things.
- Integrate teleworkers into the larger group to prevent isolation and lack of team identity.

Tips for working from home

- Keep regular home-office hours. Insist that others respect them.
- Include some flexibility. Indicate times during the day when you are available for chores or other home and family responsibilities.
- Install a separate office phone. Let the answering machine pick up calls to your home phone during your work hours.
- Have a separate area for doing home-based work—preferably a separate room with a door.
- Have separate e-mail addresses for business communications and personal communications. Don't check personal messages during your work hours.
- If you live alone, arrange to have lunch with other teleworkers, neighbors, or friends to avoid getting too isolated.
- Get dressed for work—even if you're going to be alone all day. No matter how much you might accomplish working in your pajamas, you won't feel like a professional unless you dress for work.
- Maintain frequent contact with supervisors, peers, and direct reports who are working at the office. That way, you'll remind yourself and them that you're an integral part of the team.
- Develop routines to mark the end of the workday so that work doesn't bleed into your nonwork time.

For example, close your office door at 5:00 PM—and resist the urge to go back at 9:00 PM to check business-related e-mail.

Worksheet for identifying and prioritizing your goals

<i>Worksheet for Identifying and Prioritizing Your Goals</i>					
Use this worksheet to define your goals and prioritize them according to how strongly they align with your company's efforts.					
Part I: Organizational and unit goals					
What is your company's overall goal? Your organization's mission statement, competitive strategy, and communications from senior managers can help you define the company's overall goal. Examples might include, "Begin serving new markets," "Double revenues by the end of next year," or "Offer products demonstrating the most cutting-edge technologies."					
What is your unit's contribution to your company's overall goal? How does your department or team support achievement of the company's goal?					
Part II: Individual goals					
1. In column one, list your individual goals. Ask yourself, "What do I have to do in order to ensure that my unit or team supports the company's goal? What other objectives do I want to achieve in my unit or team?"					
2. In columns two through four, indicate whether the goal is critical, enabling, or nice-to-have. Critical goals must be accomplished in order for your department or team to operate successfully and support the company's efforts. Enabling goals create more desirable business conditions in the long run or take advantage of a business opportunity. Nice-to-have goals make activities faster, easier, or more appealing but don't revolutionize your department or team.					
3. In column five, write a short statement explaining why you've defined the goal as critical, enabling, or nice-to-have. Highlight the critical and enabling goals.					
4. In column six, rank your goals in order of priority. Put a number next to each one, with "1" indicating the most important goal, "2" indicating the next most important goal, and so forth.					
Individual Goal	Critical	Enabling	Nice-to-have	Statement as to why goal is either critical, enabling or nice-to-have	Priority

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Worksheet for breaking goals into tasks

Worksheet for Breaking Goals into Tasks	
<p>Use this worksheet to break goals down into manageable tasks and activities. Review each goal; list all the key tasks and activities required to achieve the goal. Determine the sequential order, and put a number next to each task indicating where it falls in the sequence. Then estimate how much of your time each task or activity will require. Assign each task an A, B, or C priority: A-priority tasks support your critical goals, B-priority tasks support your enabling goals, and C-priority tasks include urgent and non-urgent tasks with little value or importance. Reminder: Add a 10–20% cushion of time for completion of each task, to allow for unexpected events. Fill out one of these worksheets for each of your goals.</p>	
Goal:	Priority:
Task Sequence: _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete: _____
Task: _____	
Goal:	Priority:
Task Sequence: _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete: _____
Task: _____	
Goal:	Priority:
Task Sequence: _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete: _____
Task: _____	
Goal:	Priority:
Task Sequence: _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete: _____
Task: _____	
Goal:	Priority:
Task Sequence: _____	Estimated Time Needed to Complete: _____
Task: _____	

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Daily activity log chart

Worksheet for Identifying and Evaluating Time-Wasters					
Use the following worksheet to identify your time-wasters, possible causes, and possible solutions. After you have tried your solution, assess how well it worked.					
Time-Waster	Cause	Solution	How Well Your Solution Worked		
			Not Effective	Effective	Very Effective

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To-do list

[illegible]

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Why Develop Others?

“At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies.”

Larry Bossidy

Former CEO, AlliedSignal

In today's global business environment, markets and regulations change quickly. Competitors constantly innovate. Technological changes are the norm.

In order to outmaneuver the competition and meet the demands of the moment, organizations must be agile. They must execute flawlessly. And they must transform themselves continuously.

Are your leaders ready?

Dr. Noel M. Tichy

Professor

University of Michigan Ross School of Business

We have now entered an era where I don't care what industry you're in, you need leaders who

can make decisions, make judgment calls at every single level. All the way down to the interface with the customer.

If you go to a company like Google or any of the high tech companies, a lot of the innovation that Amazon does is happening right at the front line. Go ahead, try it, put it out there, we'll learn from it. That cannot happen if the senior leadership doesn't have a commitment to both develop the leadership capability, but develop the business through engaging people at all levels of the organization.

Becoming a teaching organization

I like to tell parents that they cannot delegate their responsibility to develop their children. And I think it is the same in an organization. Day in and day out the person that has the biggest impact on people in the organization is the next level above and the associates around and below. And so to build a learning organization I say is not enough. Learning could be, you know we are learning cooking, we are learning this or that, but teaching organizations, when I learned something, I have a responsibility to teach my colleagues.

So everybody takes responsibility for generating new knowledge and it is not enough to be a learner, you then have to translate it into teaching.

The Virtuous Teaching Cycle

The role of a leader is to ensure that the people who work for them and around them are better every day. There's only one way to make people better. It's to teach them, learn from them, create what I call "virtuous teaching cycles", not command and control.

A virtuous teaching cycle is teach learn, teach learn. And the leader has a responsibility for reducing the hierarchy, for having a point of view to start the discussion, but then to be responsible to hear everyone's voice, get everyone involved in a disciplined way. It is not a free for all. But it is the leader's responsibility to create that virtuous teaching cycle.

A wonderful example of virtuous teaching cycle is the program that Roger Enrico ran at Pepsi, where every one of the 10 vice presidents comes with a business project.

Roger Enrico gets smarter as result of five days with 10 vice presidents, because he's learning from them. He needs to lower the hierarchy. He needs to be open to learning. And in turn, the people participating need to be energized and empowered to come up and engage in problem solving.

Another example is at Best Buy, where every morning in the stores you would bring 20 associates or so together and they would review the profit and loss statement from the day before, what we learned from the different customer segments in our stores, what we can do to improve our performance this day. And they do that every single day. The store manager was learning mostly from the associates on the floor.

That was a virtuous teaching cycle where everybody is teaching everybody, everybody is learning and the result has been an incredible result at Best Buy.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey S. Firestone

Founder, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co

There are clear advantages to leader-led development.

But for many leaders, taking on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities can seem daunting. You might avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or your own lack of comfort with this role.

The following tips and resources can help you impart valuable learning to your team every day.

To develop others...

- Start with a Teachable Point of View

The first requirement of being able to develop other leaders is to have what I call a teachable point of view. I often give the example of, if I ran a tennis camp and you just came to day one of the tennis camp, I better have a teachable point of view on how I teach tennis. So you are standing there looking at me and it has got four elements. One, the ideas, well how do I teach the backhand, the forehand, the serve, rules of tennis. Then if I am a good tennis coach, I have a set of values. What are the right behaviors I want, how do I want you to dress, how do I want you to behave on the tennis court.

But if that's all I have, what do I do? Show you a power point presentation and then expect you to hit 500 backhands, 500 serves, run around for eight hours. I have to have a teachable point of view on emotional energy. How do I motivate you to buy in to the ideas and values?

On one end of the spectrum it could be I threaten you with corporal punishment, the other I can give you stock options, I can make you feel good about yourself, I can help you develop as a human being, what motivates you.

And then finally, how do I make the tough judgment calls, the yes/no, decisions as the tennis coach, the ball is in, the ball is out. I don't hire consultants and set up a committee, it is yes/no. And the same with running a business, what are the products, services, distribution channels, customer segments that are going to grow top line growth and profitability of the organization.

What are the values that I want everyone in the organization to have, how do I emotionally energize thousands of people, and then how do I make the yes/no, judgments on people and on business issues. So the fundamental building block of being able to develop other leaders is to have that teachable point of view just like the tennis coach.

To develop others...

- Lead with questions

Questions are hugely important because you want to create dialogue and again, what I call a virtuous teaching cycle where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Which means everybody ought to be free to ask whatever is on their mind, whatever it will take to get clarity and understanding, but it is not the leader just coming in and freeform asking questions. I believe the leader has a responsibility for framing the discussion, for having as best they can a teachable point of view, they may need help from their people in flushing it out, but they need to set the stage but then it has to be a very interactive, what I call virtuous teaching cycle environment, teach learn, teach learn, teach learn.

To develop others...

- Make it part of your routine

A good example to me of an outstanding leader developing other leaders is Myrtle Potter who at the time I am commenting was Chief Operating Officer of Genentech running the commercial side of the business. And she would take time at the end of every single meeting and do some coaching of the whole team on how we could perform as a team better, and then she would

often take individuals and say, could we spend 10 minutes over a cup of coffee, I want to give you some feedback and coaching on that report that you just presented on or how you are handling a particularly difficult human resource issue, but it was part of her regular routine. And I think the challenge for all of us as leaders is to make that a way of life and it is built into the fabric of how we lead and it is not a one off event, three times a year. It is happening almost every day.

To develop others...

- Make it a priority

One of the biggest challenges in getting people kind of on this path is to overcome some of their own resistance, either fear or the way I view the world I don't have time for this, everybody can make time. Roger Enrico is CEO of Pepsi. He didn't have time to go off for a week at a time and run training sessions. He had to readjust his calendar. So it requires you to look in the mirror and say, is this important. If it is important, of course I can make the time. Then I have to get over my own anxiety on how well I can do it, but it is a commitment to get on the path that says: this is how I am going to drive my own performance and the performance of my colleagues.

To develop others...

- Learn to teach

I think the biggest mistake is to assume you are going to be good at it right off the bat. It is like learning anything else. First time you go out and try and play tennis, good luck. But you got to stay with it and you got to engage your people in helping make you better and them better. And so it is a journey you need to get on, not I am going to do it perfectly when I start out.

If you want to be a great leader who is a great teacher, it's very simple. You have got to dive into the deep end of the pool. But you've got to dive into the pool with preparation. I don't want you drowning. I want you succeeding. It is extraordinarily rewarding for most human beings to teach others. I think once you can turn that switch on, it is self perpetuating. You get a lot of reinforcement, your team is better. You perform better because your performance goes up and it becomes this virtuous teaching cycle.

Your opportunity to develop others

We've heard why developing others can drive greater business results, and how to make the most of your leader-led development efforts. The materials provided in Develop Others enable you to create personalized learning experiences for YOUR team within the flow of their daily activities. Use the guides and projects to engage your team quickly. And to explore how key concepts apply to them in the context of their priorities and goals.

The value of teaching is the performance of the organization is totally dependent on making your people smarter and more aligned every day as the world changes. In the 21st century we are not going to get by with command and control. We are going to have to get by with knowledge creation. The way you create knowledge in an organization is you create these virtuous teaching cycles where you are teaching and learning simultaneously, responding to customer demands and changes, responding to changes in the global environment. My bottom line is if you're not teaching, you're not leading.

A leader's most important role in any organization is making good judgments — well informed, wise decisions about people, strategy and crises that produce the desired outcomes. When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment nothing else matters. In addition to making their own good judgment calls, good leaders develop good judgment among their team members.

Dr. Noel M. Tichy

Professor, University of Michigan Ross School of Business

Dr. Noel M. Tichy is Professor of Management and Organizations, and Director of the Global Business Partnership at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. The Global Business Partnership links companies and students around the world to develop and engage business leaders to incorporate global citizenship activities, both environmental projects and human capital development, for those at the bottom of the pyramid. Previously, Noel was head of General Electric's Leadership Center at Crotonville, where he led the transformation to action learning at GE. Between 1985 and 1987, he was Manager of Management Education for GE where he directed its worldwide development efforts at Crotonville. He currently consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates. Noel is author of numerous books and articles, including:

For more information about Noel Tichy, visit <http://www.noeltichy.com>.

Share an Idea

Leaders are in a unique position to recognize the ideas and tools that are most relevant and useful for their teams. If you only have a few minutes, consider sharing an idea or tool from this topic with your team or peers that is relevant and timely to their situation.

For example, consider sending one of the three recommended ideas or tools below to your team with your comments or questions on how the idea or tool can be of value to your organization. By simply sharing the item, you can easily engage others in important conversations and activities relevant to your goals and priorities.

[Steps for managing your time](#)

[Tips for working from home](#)

[Daily activity log chart](#)

To share an idea, tip, step, or tool with your comments via e-mail, select the EMAIL link in the upper right corner of the page that contains the idea, tip, step, or tool that you wish to share.

Discussion 1: Setting your daily priorities and schedule

E-mail. Voice mail. Meetings. Paperwork. Direct reports who continually ask for help or bring you their problems. How can you be an accessible, responsible manager — yet actually get work done and accomplish your highest-priority goals at the same time?

You and your team need to manage your time skillfully. Time management is the discipline of organizing, allocating, and controlling time you use in such a way that you achieve your desired results. Time management forces you to be explicit about what you value and helps you align your efforts accordingly.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about (1) identifying and prioritizing goals; and (2) keeping a realistic schedule.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Setting Your Daily Priorities and Schedule](#)

[Discussion Guide: Setting Your Daily Priorities and Schedule](#)

[Discussion Slides: Setting Your Daily Priorities and Schedule \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

The discussion you have with your team will help individual team members improve their time management skills, thereby enhancing their productivity at work.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

Discussion 2: Defeating common time-wasters

If you are like many other managers, you may wonder how well your team is currently managing its time. After all, you are responsible for your team's productivity and ultimate success. And while most employees have the very best intentions for managing their time, a number of time-wasters often get in the way.

Fortunately, these time-wasters typically follow predictable patterns and can be overcome. Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about (1) being on the alert for common time-wasters; and (2) building habits to overcome them.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Defeating Common "Time-Wasters"](#)

[Discussion Guide: Defeating Common "Time-Wasters"](#)

[Discussion Slides: Defeating Common "Time-Wasters" \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

The discussion you have with your team will help them refine their ability to identify and overcome common time-wasters.

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

Start a Group Project

Just like any change effort, successfully incorporating new skills and behaviors into one's daily activities and habits takes time and effort. After reviewing or discussing the concepts in this topic, your direct reports will still need your support to fully apply new concepts and skills. They will need to overcome a variety of barriers including a lack of time, lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes. They will also need opportunities to hone their skills and break old habits. To help ensure their success, you can provide safe opportunities for individuals and your team as a whole to practice and experiment with new skills and behaviors on the job.

For example, to encourage the adoption of new norms, you can provide your team members with coaching, feedback, and additional time to complete tasks that require the use of new skills. Management approaches such as these will encourage team members to experiment with new skills until they become proficient.

Group learning projects provide another valuable technique for accelerating team members' development of new behaviors. A group learning project is an on-the-job activity aimed at providing team members with direct experience implementing their new knowledge and skills. Through a learning project, team members discover how new concepts work in the context of their situation, while simultaneously having a direct and tangible impact on the organization.

The documents below provide steps, tips, and a template for initiating a group learning project with your team, along with two project recommendations for this topic.

Download resources:

[Tips for Initiating and Supporting a Learning Project](#)

[Learning Project Plan Template](#)

[Learning Project: How Am I Spending My Time?](#)

[Learning Project: Improving Work/Life Balance](#)

Are You Spending Your Time the Right Way?

Melissa Raffoni. "Are You Spending Your Time the Right Way?" *Harvard Management Update*, July 2006.

[Download file](#)

Summary

Sure, you set goals and make to-do lists, but are they the right ones? Although you understand intellectually that time is your scarcest resource, you probably find it difficult to gain a strategic perspective on how you actually spend your time each workweek. Using a three-step plan—breaking your job responsibilities into distinct categories, asking yourself what percentage of time you should spend in each category, and checking for alignment with your superiors and colleagues—you can keep track of how your job expectations align with the time you give them during your week. This article includes a sample weekly time log for a management consultant.

Resist the Urge to Overreach—and Win Back Valuable Time

Paul Michelman, Alistair Corbett, and Glen Williams. "Resist the Urge to Overreach—and Win Back Valuable Time." *Harvard Management Update*, June 2005.

[Download file](#)

Summary

Your ability to use your time as effectively as possible is jeopardized at every turn. New priorities spring up like dandelions in May. Strategies shift, market conditions change, and unforeseeable crises demand immediate responses. But if you look closely, you'll see that most time management problems

stem from deeply embedded individual habits, which, thankfully, can be corrected. One of the most nefarious time robbers is overreaching. Many ambitious and dedicated managers take on new tasks without thinking about how they'll actually get the work done. Their desire to confront new challenges and build the value those challenges can provide blinds them to the realities of their workload. In the end, they accomplish nothing well.

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